

U.N. report criticises Iran over human rights

GENEVA (Agencies) — The United Nations has expressed concern over the human rights situation in Iran, criticising Tehran for subjecting prisoners to torture and warning that public executions were on the rise.

The report by a special U.N. representative, Reynaldo Galindo Pohl, accused Iran's government of inflicting sentences incompatible with international norms, including amputation and flagellation. It said there had been an increase in the number of public executions and executions by stoning.

He criticised authorities for extending the death penalty to include price speculation and racketeering.

The Salvadorean jurist voiced particular concern at the incidence of whippings and amputations and the increase in the number of public beatings and deaths by stoning.

Torture was still widely used to extract confessions, especially in politically sensitive cases, Mr. Galindo Pohl said.

The 29-page report will be considered by the 53-nation U.N. Human Rights Commission later this month in a procedure reserved serious violations.

Mr. Galindo Pohl said there were signs of gross prisoner overcrowding. One former convict described how prison units for 150 people contained 700 to 1,000, with many forced to sleep in the toilets. Hygiene was appalling and disease was rife, with practically no medical treatment.

The government maintains the prison population is 100,000, half of them sentenced for drug-related crimes.

Mr. Galindo Pohl said the 73-year-old former chief of military police, Azizollah Amir-Rahimi, had been arrested last November after writing an open letter to President Hashemi Rafsanjani to press for more democratic reforms.

In his report, Mr. Galindo

said 63 executions were reported in the press last year, many allegedly for violent crimes. The vast majority of executions went undocumented after international criticism of the high number of cases, he said.

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Baha's continued un-

abolished, said Mr. Galindo

Pohl. He indicated that au-

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last year's murder of three

prominent Protestant church

leaders and said the case

against the official suspect

was riddled with inconsis-

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Mexico alleges U.S. human rights violations

Mexican rights group says prisoners show signs of torture

MEXICO CITY (Agencies)

A government human rights inspector says four of seven people arrested two weeks ago for alleged ties with Indian rebels showed signs of having been tortured.

All seven said they were forced to sign confessions after they were arrested and were not allowed to read what they had allegedly confessed.

The allegations were contained in a 39-page report, released late Monday, on 24 complaints the government's human rights commission received following President Ernesto Zedillo's Feb. 9 crackdown on the rebel Zapatista National Liberation Army.

Jorge Madrazo Cuellar, president of the commission, read the report to journalists and officials in Mexico City. He also condemned ranchers and landowners for harassing Roman Catholic Bishop Samuel Ruiz over the weekend in the southern state of Chiapas.

The ranchers and landowners accuse the bishop of complicity with the rebels, who set up in Chiapas last year to demand better living conditions for Indian peasants and clean elections.

More than 30 people were arrested in the crackdown on the rebels and the government claims it has found rebel safe houses and weapons caches in Chiapas, and two

other states.

Five men and two women were arrested in the Veracruz town of Yanga on Feb. 9. The report said commission investigators and doctors certified that four of the men showed definite signs of torture.

It said other complaints made to the commission are under investigation.

The Zapatista rebellion began Jan. 1, 1994, and at least 145 people died in fighting until a ceasefire was declared 12 days later.

The Mexican army has moved into rebel zones, and the insurgents have fled into the jungle along with thousands of sympathizers from area villages.

Peace efforts in southern Mexico have suffered a setback with both the government and Maya Indian rebels refusing to drop their rival claims over a huge swath of jungle territory.

Meanwhile, Mexican authorities say they are concerned about a rash of alleged human rights abuses by U.S. law enforcement agents against illegal Mexican immigrants along the U.S.-Mexican border.

Marco Antonio Garcia

Blanco, Mexico's consul to

the southwest city of Tucson, Arizona, said there have been "cases of substantial human rights violations" along the 3,200-kilometres (nearly 2,000-miles) common border.

Garcia Blanco said in an interview that Mexico had filed complaints with U.S. authorities about the incidents, which ranged from allegations of verbal abuse to physical harm and excessive use of force against illegal

aliens.

Firearms were allegedly involved in incidents reported between August and January, five of which resulted in deaths or wounds.

Members of the U.S. Border Patrol acknowledged that abuses had occurred, but did not disclose any details.

Migration issues, including the alleged human rights violations, will be on the agenda at a joint border conference on Feb. 22 in the Arizona border town of Nogales, which is expected to draw 20 officials from Arizona and the neighbouring Mexican state of Sonora.

While stressing that "there are problems," Mr. Garcia Blanco said the positive side of the equation was that "the authorities and representatives of the states of Arizona and Sonora have an exemplary relationship" characterized by a willingness to resolve their differences.

"Here, there is not the kind of anti-immigrant climate seen in other parts of the United States," Mr. Garcia Blanco said, in an apparent reference to California and Florida, where there is growing resentment of the social costs of illegal immigration.

Thirty of Mexico's 40 U.S. consulates are concentrated in border states, three of them in Arizona: in Tucson, Phoenix and Nogales.



Mexican army soldiers stationed in the village of La Garrucha in the state of Chiapas in Mexico play a friendly game of soccer. The troops advanced to the village which is in an area formerly controlled by the Zapatista National Liberation Army (AFP photo)

U.S. House Republicans set fast pace; but steepest hurdles yet to come

WASHINGTON (AP)

House Republicans have abandoned Congress' leisurely pace as they rush to deliver on their "Contract With America." But nearly halfway to their 100-day deadline, much more than half the job remains undone.

And the stickiest issues are yet to come.

From a balanced budget amendment to tax cuts, from slashing regulations to revamping welfare, every item in the contract is poll-tested and highly popular with the public.

Still, lawmakers are discovering as they race from item to item that some proposals need improvement, some are divisive and some could hit a brick wall in the Senate or encounter a presidential veto.

"It's a little bit like a multicourse dinner in which the first couple of courses are bland and acceptable to everybody. As it goes on, the dishes get more exotic and harder to digest," said Rutgers University political scientist Ross Baker.

The contract, a campaign document that hundreds of republican House candidates signed and ran on last fall, pledged votes on 10 legislative packages in the first 100 days of the 104th Congress if Republicans won control of the House of Representatives.

"We've got some tough stuff ahead of us," House majority leader Dick Armey of Texas, said in an interview. But, with an optimism not universally shared, he predicted 80 per cent of the "contract" would pass the House and 50 per cent of it eventually would become law.

Blind, almost deaf and confined to a wheelchair, she chose a black crepe dress for the occasion, remarking: "This good stuff, it'll last a long time."

Calment lunched on crab, duck and champagne with friends at her retirement home in Arles, in the south of France, before sharing a mammoth chocolate birthday cake with 80 guests, including France's health minister.

Wednesday marks the midpoint of what so far has been a highly productive opening run marked by iron party discipline and virtually no distractions.

Still to come, in order of appearance:

— Regulatory reform. The House this week takes up a

moratorium on most govern-

ment regulations and a re-

quirement to weigh costs

when evaluating the benefit

of new regulations. Both chambers have already passed bills making it harder to impose new, unfunded regulations on states. Negotiators are working out a House-Senate compromise that Mr. Clinton is expected to sign.

— Legal reforms, including limits on punitive damages. Mr. Gingrich says he expects a difficult fight because of trial lawyers' lobbying clout.

— A constitutional amendment to limit congressional terms. Republican leaders refuse to say which way the vote will go.

— Welfare reform. Huge block grants are the likely outcome, after huge disagreements over what to require of governors and recipients. Some type of Senate bill is virtually assured, but Mr. Clinton's signature is not.

— Revenue measures, including a \$500-per-child tax credit and a cut in the capital gains tax rate. The contract promises are likely to be scaled back by senators worried about the budget deficit.

— A stiff crime bill that replaces crime prevention and police hiring programs enacted last year with \$10 billion in block grants to states and countries. Senate prospects are precarious, and President Bill Clinton is threatening veto.

— A national security bill that reduces U.S. support for U.S. peacekeeping and restricts the president's authority to place U.S. troops under foreign commanders. The Clinton administration says the House bill is an unacceptable infringement upon executive powers; Senate prospects are uncertain.

— Nevertheless, the House expects to complete action on what Mr. Gingrich calls "the most divisive legislative proposal since the new deal" (launched by President Franklin D. Roosevelt) began in 1933" in time to recess for Eastern on April 6. That's eight days shy of 100.

Meanwhile, on a night of polite competition and a few pointed disagreements, Sen. Phil Gramm of Texas took a moment to capture the unifying spirit of the room:

"The next president is not going to be Bill Clinton."

But if not, then who?

Oldest person still mischievous at 120

ARLES, France (R)

— She was born in the year Bizet's Carmen was first staged and Tolstoy published Anna Karenina, and a year before Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone.

Frenchwoman Jeanne Calment, the oldest person in the world, celebrated her 120th birthday Tuesday, still going strong with a wit and mischievous smile which she calls the key to her longevity.

Blind, almost deaf and confined to a wheelchair, she chose a black crepe dress for the occasion, remarking: "This good stuff, it'll last a long time."

Calment lunched on crab, duck and champagne with friends at her retirement home in Arles, in the south of France, before sharing a mammoth chocolate birthday cake with 80 guests, including France's health minister.

Wednesday marks the midpoint of what so far has been a highly productive opening run marked by iron party discipline and virtually no distractions.

EU ministers seek animal transit compromise

BRUSSELS (Agencies)

EU farm ministers Tuesday held a second day of negotiations in an effort to break the Union's 18-month deadlock on maximum journey times for livestock.

The EU's French presidency, which has indicated that it will not schedule any further discussions of the issue during its six-month term in the EU chair if there is not a breakthrough at this meeting, tabled a complex compromise package in an effort to bridge the north-south divide that has produced the stand-off.

The northern EU states, under pressure from animal welfare campaigners, have been campaigning for limits of between eight and 15 hours on the maximum time animals can be transported across Europe and for strict controls to be imposed on hauliers covering issues such as the amount of space each animal has in lorries and the regularity of feeding and watering intervals.

But the southern states, particularly Italy and Greece, have resisted any limits, arguing that the northern meat-exporting countries have an economic interest in encouraging the slaughter of animals in their slaughterhouses rather than have them transported to the south.

The French compromise was based on applying different standards to different categories of animals.

The toughest standard would be applied to veal calves, lambs and kids for whom a 15-hour maximum journey time would apply with a two-hour stop becoming mandatory after the first eight hours.

For cows, sheep and goats a maximum of 24 hours is envisaged with two hours rest periods obligatory each eight hours. As for the younger

animals a new journey could not begin before 12 hours after unloading.

Pigs could be transported for up to 24 hours with only a stop for watering obligatory every eight hours and if the carrying equipment meets EU standards, the maximum journey is 48 hours.

For journeys by sea, a 12-hour rest would be obligatory at the port of landing unless the period of sea transport forms part of a general route plan indicated in advance.

Although the French proposals fall significantly short of the initial demands made by countries like Britain and Germany, the northern states have a powerful incentive to agree to the deal.

In July the EU presidency passes to Spain, who will be succeeded by Italy. Neither country is expected to make a major effort to broker a compromise since the existing legislative vacuum at the

European level suits them perfectly well. They are also under little domestic pressure to address the animal welfare issue.

Britain's problem is particularly acute since the ferry companies which cross the English channel, responding to a wave of public protest about the length of animals journeys, are refusing to carry livestock, bringing the British export industry to a virtual standstill.

British Farm Minister William Waldegrave was left facing a difficult choice between accepting a deal which might not be judged sufficient for the ferry companies to lift their ban or rejecting it and having to endure the situation for at least another 18 months.

Other problems concerned Austria, which imposes a six-hour limit in its own soil and was waiting for parliamentary clearance to approve a deal

which would significantly dilute its controls.

Ireland was also unhappy with the compromise and was seeking revision of the ferry-clause which would count sea journey time as rest time excluded from the overall journey time.

On the other side of the debate, Spanish officials indicated that they could probably go along with the French proposal.

Italy and Portugal were holding out for further concessions. But, even if they were backed by Greece, they would not have enough votes to block a deal on the French proposal in the event that the northern states decided to accept it.

On Monday, former French film star Brigitte Bardot climbed into a container lorry to join protesters, dressed as sheep, denouncing cruelty to animals transported for slaughter.

Blur sweeps Brits with four awards

LONDON (AP) — The pop band Blur won four Brit Music Awards including top British artists of the year. The first band to take four prizes in the Pop Music Awards, Blur also won Best Album for Parklife, Best Video and Best Single.

Madonna headed the line-up for the presentation show at London's Alexandra Palace.

The awards, sponsored by Britannia Music are voted by an academy of 500 people largely from the record industry.

Elton John received a lifetime achievement award for his contribution to the music industry.

Paul Weller, former leader of the Jam and the Style Council, was named best British solo artist, narrowly beating Eric Clapton, Seal, Morrissey and Elton Costello.

Best British female solo artist was Eddi Reader, formerly lead singer with Fairground Attraction.

Best British dance act was M People and best British newcomer was Oasis. The film soundtrack prize was won by Oscar-nominated Pulp Fiction, beating The Lion King, Four Weddings And A Funeral, Forrest Gump and Philadelphia.

Nellee Hooper won best British producer for work with Madonna, among many other stars.

Tony Merton, star of East 17, performed with his band from a wheelchair after falling off the stage during rehearsals.

Nonja the artistic orangutan

VIENNA (AP) — Nonja is a charming orangutan artist who has had four exhibitions and sells her paintings at \$400 apiece. Her talent first emerged five years ago at a medical seminar, and now at the age of 19 (equivalent to 35 years in human terms), the great ape "has made enormous progress," according to her tutor Claudia Klement.

They work together at the Schoenbrunn Zoo, reportedly the world's oldest, set in the grounds of the old imperial palace on the outskirts of the Austrian capital. Ms. Klement remembers how it all started.

The zoo had already trained a chimpanzee called Jonny to draw, and wanted to experiment with an orangutan.

"We showed her what to do.

She was very curious and copied our gestures with great enthusiasm," Ms. Klement said.

"But Nonja kept going off the paper and scribbling all over the table, and she often used to eat the crayons."

Nonja learned to concentrate carefully enough to keep the drawing on the sheet of paper and began producing harmonious lines and shading.

It was such a startling contrast to the "disastrous" behaviour of her companion Vladimir.

"He destroyed everything, crayons, paintbrushes, he threw the pots of paint about and howled," Ms. Klement recalled.

"He showed absolutely no interest in the activity and became aggressive every time."

Nonja now uses non-toxic colours

which she selects after due deliberation, and only takes an occasional nibble.

She tends towards sombre tones, browns, deep reds, black — yellow she avoids most of the time.

The works are "abstract," comparable to the output of a human infant of two or three years.

The amazing monkey has even devised a technique which gives scope for lots of variations:

Clearly enjoying herself, Nonja flicks drops of paint at the paper with a brush, creating a new visual effect.

As artist go, this simian is quite a perfectionist.

She will only paint early in the morning, for about 30 minutes, an hour at the most.

They said the Burmese troops fired an undetermined type of gas into the base,

which some said made the rebels unconscious and others said stopped their breathing and made their eyes tearful.

A Bangkok-based support group for the Burmese

opposition, Burma Issues,

said in a statement that the

"poison shells," interspersed

with regular artillery, caused

disorientation and unconsciousness.

The group said an

unknown number of rebels

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Chairman of the Board of Directors:

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Editor-in-Chief:

GEORGE S. HAWATMEH

Editorial and advertising offices:

Jordan Press Foundation,
University Road, P.O. Box 6710, Amman, Jordan.

Telephone: 667171/6, 670141-4

Telex: 21497 ALRAI JO

Fax: 696183

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Gimmick for a day

ISLAMIST AND leftist deputies stage-managed some sort of a parliamentary coup yesterday when they collaborated to prevent the last meeting of the Lower House of Parliament in the second ordinary session from convening. That they did to stop the House from discussing a draft legislation that would repeal three laws which prohibit the sale of land to Israelis and impose an economic boycott against the Jewish state.

While the opposition has thus succeeded in putting off debate of the bill until Parliament reconvenes either in May or June, as is widely expected, we wonder whether the whole move was in fact more than a public relations stunt. For it does not make much political sense, at least from a judicial point of view, to start a tug of war between the government and the coalition of parliamentary groups opposed to the peace treaty over this particular issue.

The government of Prime Minister Sharif Zeid Ben Shaker had hoped that Parliament would have yesterday referred to its Judiciary Committee a 1973 law that prohibits and penalises the sale of real estate to Israelis, a 1958 law that slams total economic boycott against Israel and a 1953 law that forbids trade and commerce with the Jewish state. Some of these legislations carry the death penalty for violators. There are clearly other laws that are less obvious or direct, which can be construed as repugnant to the peace treaty.

The dispute over this issue is unnecessary because, from a strictly juridical sense, any treaty that is ratified by the government supersedes any other national legislation. This means that any piece of legislation, which is contrary to any such treaty, will not be upheld in a court of law. Since the Jordanian-Israeli treaty was approved by both chambers of Parliament and was accordingly ratified by the King, there can be no grounds or justification to oppose any legislative initiative to amend or repeal laws that run counter to the letter or spirit of its terms. As for the emotionally charged issue of land sale to Israelis, there is in place sufficient safeguards to prevent any panic. Foreigners, including Israelis, can purchase land only within municipal boundaries and even then only after a court's approval. If many Jordanians feel so strongly about not selling real estate to Israelis or any other group of foreigners, all they would have to do is exercise restraint and avoid becoming easy prey to manipulators and exploiters. True, national sentiment can be best promoted by public awareness of all probable dangers that may lie ahead. But people do not need the stick of the law to stop selling any part of the homeland to any side, be it Israeli or otherwise.

Just as there is no law and there can be no sustainable law that would force people to sell land to foreigners, the same goes for the areas of trade and commerce. The government, on the other hand, is legally bound to do all that is necessary to streamline all the country's laws so that they become harmonious with its old and new international obligations. Any other course would be both illegal and illogical.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

A COLUMNIST in al Ra'i daily Tuesday called on Arab countries to support Egypt's bid to force Israel to abandon its nuclear programme, stressing that nuclear weapons in the region pose a serious threat to all Arabs. Hosni Avesh said that Israel is the only country in the region which possesses nuclear weapons. For its part, the United States condones Israel's actions, helps it to mass nuclear weapons and continues to supply it with economic and military assistance, said the writer. At the same time, he said, we see the United States trying to force Egypt to renew its commitment to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and to deny the Arabs the right to arm themselves against potential threat from the Jewish state.

It is the duty of the Arab countries not to leave Egypt alone facing the American pressure and the Israeli arrogance, said the writer. Israel's nuclear monopoly in the area is dangerous because it means continued Israeli hegemony over the entire region and a direct threat to the Arab Nation's future, added the writer. The alternative to Israel's abandoning its nuclear programme, said the writer, is for the Arabs to possess their own nuclear might in order to protect themselves and deter Israel's plans in their region.

COMMENTING on the deadlock in the Israeli-Palestinian talks over the implementation of the second phase of the Oslo agreement, a writer in Al Dustour said that the Palestinians should persevere and never retreat from their legitimate position. Saleh Qulah said that Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has wisely chosen to remain steadfast in the self-rule areas rather than listen to calls from within the Palestinian people to withdraw and return to Tunis. Any withdrawal from the Gaza Strip is tantamount to another catastrophe, said the writer who added that return to Tunis by the Palestine National Authority (PNA) would mean an escape from responsibility. The writer said that the Palestinian leadership ought to insist that Israel redeploy its forces in the West Bank and that Palestinians be allowed to hold their planned elections as stipulated in the Oslo deal. Furthermore there should not be any suspension or freezing of the Israeli-Palestinian talks as this would benefit the Israelis and would mean running away from responsibility of meeting the challenge, added the writer. The writer said that the self-rule constituted the first step in the Palestinians' drive to attain their national aspirations and, therefore, the Palestinians should cling hard to their rights and strive to fulfill their national dream.

Washington Watch

One state's view of Arab concerns

By Dr. James Zogby

THE ARAB-AMERICAN INSTITUTE recently sponsored a poll in the northeastern state of New Hampshire. We were partners in the poll with Fox television news of New York City and the New York Post. The pollster was the John Zogby Group of New York.

While the New York media focused its attention on the poll's questions on presidential politics, we commissioned our portion of the poll to develop ideas for the types of issues that Arab-Americans could and should raise in the upcoming 1996 elections. In American politics, this is known as "testing the waters," that is, looking for a general idea of where public attitudes are at the moment. New Hampshire is a key state since it is the site of the first presidential primary in the U.S., and in many ways a test of New Hampshire voters is a good indication of how voters think nationally.

The poll indicates that, if we are going to establish our case to support the Arab countries, we have serious work to do. But it also shows the base from which we will have to work; and in some cases that base is solid while in most cases it will require some work. Among the positive findings was a much lower than expected anti-Arab-American and anti-American Muslim sentiment. In fact, the attitudes towards these two groups were about the same as attitudes towards Asian-Americans and American-Jews — which shows that an initial goal of our empowerment project, allowing us to function as other ethnic groups do, is being realized. This provides a solid basis for our political work.

Another positive finding in the poll was that Egypt once again outpaces Israel in popularity. Egypt's favourable rating was 42 per cent, while its unfavourable rating was 32 per cent. The figures for Israel were 44 per cent favourable and 40 per cent unfavourable. While Israel's favourable rating was slightly higher, Egypt's net rating (subtracting the unfavourable rating from the favourable rating) came out to be 10 per cent, markedly higher than Israel's four per cent.

Other Arab countries did not fare as well, but most showed an improvement over polls done in previous years. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, for example, showed identical 39 per cent favourable ratings compared with identical 44 per cent unfavourable ratings. Jordan had a 31 per cent favourable rating with an unfavourable rating of 45 per cent.

Lebanon has not yet recovered from the strong negatives engendered by its 17-year civil war, and the hostage-taking and the bombing of the U.S. Marine Corps barracks which many Americans still associate with that country. Lebanon's favourable rating was a low 19 per cent and its unfavourable rating was a high 60 per cent. Surprisingly, the same is true of the Palestinians. The positive feelings the peace accords brought out were outweighed by decades of anti-Palestinian propaganda which still shapes many attitudes, leaving the Palestinians rating of only 19 per cent positive to 64 per cent negative.

By comparison, Germany rates a 74 per cent favourable and 15 per cent unfavourable, Mexico 47 per cent favourable and 40 per cent unfavourable, and Russia 45 per cent favourable and 40 per cent unfavourable.

More importantly, when New Hampshire voters were asked whether they support continued foreign aid to countries which receive such assistance, only 20 per cent support aid to Egypt and the same number support aid to the Palestinians while 32 per cent support continued aid to Israel. At the same time, 49 per cent support aid to Russia and 42 per cent support aid to Mexico.

The poll indicates that Egypt, in particular, has a standing that is strong enough to make it an issue on the

agenda, but that alone will not put it on the agenda: Work must be done. For example, Egypt's position on the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) — that it will not sign the treaty unless and until Israel also signs it — should be supported. If the demand that Israel sign the treaty is stated as an Egyptian position, it can garnet strong public support.

It also appears that U.S. aid to Egypt is not popular precisely because Egypt has never actively stated its case for this aid. Instead, the aid is viewed as tied to the aid to Israel as a part of the Camp David accords (a position adopted in order to win congressional support). But as the silent partner in this arrangement, Egypt has never used its popularity to lay out the case for the aid, as shown by the fact that aid to Egypt is much less popular than the country as a whole. (Note that the ratio of support for Israeli aid to support for Israel as a whole is 3/4, while the same ratio for Egypt is 1/2; there is a reservoir of positive feeling for Egypt that has not yet been tapped on the foreign aid question).

Lebanon and the Palestinians, it is clear, have serious work to do. Lebanon, and Lebanese-Americans in particular, have for too long rested on their past glories. They have failed to appreciate the tremendous damage done to Lebanon's reputation over the past two decades. A national campaign for Lebanon is clearly in order if public opinion is to consider Lebanon in the more positive light it deserves.

So, too, is the case with the Palestinians. Unfortunately, the PLO has never taken seriously the need to do meaningful public relations work in the U.S. Even after the Madrid peace conference when U.S. public opinion was ready for a change, the Palestinian leadership did not make a concerted effort to reshape U.S. opinion. The PLO office is still understaffed, underfunded and without a directive or a mandate to fully engage in a U.S. public relations campaign.

When I raise the importance of this issue to various Arab leaders, I am frequently asked three questions:

Can it be done?

Is it important to do?

How could it be done?

Can it be done? Ask the Saudis. While Israel has a plus 4 rating and Saudi Arabia has a minus 5, given the fact that the poll has a margin of error of +/- 4.5 per cent, the Saudi and Israeli ratings are virtually statistically equal.

Imagine: Israel with the most powerful foreign lobby in Washington, with the support of a tremendously influential Jewish community and an extraordinarily successful public relations effort is now only viewed as slightly more favourable than Saudi Arabia, if at all. Why? Because, over the past five years, the Saudis have waged a public relations battle in the U.S. Despite the enormous cultural and religious differences between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, and despite the fact that most Americans historically tend to resent countries they spend lives and dollars to defend, Saudi Arabia's campaign has succeeded in turning U.S. opinion into a more favourable view of the kingdom. (A poll just three years ago showed Saudi Arabia with a 32 per cent favourable and 48 per cent unfavourable rating).

Is it important? Since the U.S. Congress shapes so much of U.S. foreign policy and perceptions of what is popular and acceptable, it is critically important to have or win a favourable public opinion rating.

Each time the pro-Israel side shapes the public debate on a question, they succeed to some degree in influencing public policy. Elements of this community are still, as I have noted for months, engaged in a strategy to discredit Saudi Arabia (as unstable, bankrupt and backward), or

Egypt (as unnecessary, untrustworthy and unstable), or Islam (as the new post-cold war "enemy"). It seems that the Israelis have perceived a danger in two Arab countries being perceived as close allies of the U.S. and popular with the public. It is imperative that the Arab countries respond and take seriously the need to not only improve their public relations standing but also to use their standing to help the U.S. public debate on Middle East priorities.

How can it be done? The problem is simple and has been well-developed by the Israelis. First, cultivate friends — elected officials, constituent groups (business leaders, interest groups, churches), especially those groups whose interests are served through their relationship with the Arab World. It is especially important that Arab leaders work with Arab-Americans — we are, in the end, their strongest supporters. And our strength and theirs are intimately related to one another.

Next, it is important to establish direct contact with the U.S. people. I have long argued that we have a great deal to learn from the Israeli model. When an Israeli prime minister comes to the U.S., he first goes to major public events in cities like New York, Chicago and Los Angeles (speaking to thousands and appearing on television and radio), establishing his public message before he comes to Washington. By the time he arrives in Washington, U.S. leaders have seen the public support and heard the public message.

Arab leaders, on the other hand, rarely go anywhere other than New York (to appear at the United Nations — a venue Americans don't pay attention to), and then to Washington for quiet meetings with the president and congressional leaders. On occasion, they will address a think tank in Washington — but almost never will they venture out into the real America and give the American people a chance to see them, know them (possibly come to like them) and see their message in their local media.

In an earlier poll we did, we found that President Hosni Mubarak was far more popular in the U.S. than Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Imagine if Mr. Mubarak were to take his message on nuclear non-proliferation or what must be done to make the peace process work, to major U.S. cities. Arab-Americans would gladly sponsor such events — it would be a plus for both Egypt and the local Arab-American communities (who would clearly gain in stature from such sponsorships). It would be a plus for the U.S. people who would hear, from a leader they respect, what should be done to build peace. And it would be a plus for the U.S. since it would provide badly needed balance to our foreign policy debate.

The rest of the New Hampshire poll, as cited in the New York Post, also found that Kansas Senator Robert Dole held a commanding lead over all other Republican challengers in that state's Republican primary. Mr. Dole received 45 per cent support while his closest competitors, CNN commentator Pat Buchanan and Texas Senator Phil Gramm each received 10 per cent.

The poll also showed that President Clinton would easily defeat any and all potential Democratic challengers, if the primary were held today. Mr. Clinton received 66 per cent of the Democratic support, with his nearest possible competitor (Nebraska Senator Bob Kerrey) receiving only 9 per cent.

If the general election were held today, the poll found that Mr. Clinton would defeat any of his potential Republican rivals except Mr. Dole. This held true for all the possible three-way races including former chairman of the joint chiefs of staff running as an independent: Mr. Clinton won all those possible races except the ones including Mr. Dole.

pied territories, and those in exile (mostly as refugees). Now Israel is trying to fragment those Palestinians living in the territories into "reserves" allotted to them by Israel on land left after it has completed its annexation for its colonizing settlers and their security. It is this forced Israeli settlement, rather than the concern to find a political settlement entailing an end to the occupation, that mocks the peace and demands an immediate review of Palestinian political strategy. The issue of settlement activity and Jerusalem must occupy a central place in this strategy.

The PLO and the Palestine National Authority have a duty and an opportunity now to mobilise support from all quarters on a platform that gives absolute priority to the complete cessation of all Israeli settlement activities in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and that would suspend negotiations with Israel until this happens.

The PLO and the FNA should insist on tackling the question of Arab Jerusalem now and not leave it to the final status phase of the negotiations, since Israel is going ahead in changing this historic and unique city, which Palestinians wish to see restored as the capital of their future state.

The agenda of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations therefore needs restating so that it centres on the issues of dismantling Israeli settlements, Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian territory occupied in June 1967, and the establishment of a Palestinian state, and on the means of addressing the acknowledged rights of Palestinian refugees as an integral part of the Palestinian people. If these issues are not addressed, then whatever emerges will not be peace but an imposed settlement that deliberately ignores the rights and aspirations of the historical wronged party in the conflict.

Ahead of the meeting Mr. Arafat insisted on a rapid Israeli pullback.

"Israeli leaders are shilly-shallying and making several pretexts including security," the Palestinian leader charged in an interview with the London-based Arabic daily Al Hayat.

Mr. Arafat arrived in Cairo from Tunis where he failed to convince the PLO's Political Department chief Farouk Kaddoumi to take part in the Executive Committee meeting.

Mahmoud Abbas, a former negotiator who helped to draw up the Oslo autonomy

Features

Drop the n keep mind

By James P. Grant

This article was written shortly before Mr. Grant's death on Jan. 28

NEW YORK — Illness has forced me to resign as executive director of the United Nations Children's Fund after 15 years. It has been a privilege to serve a cause as noble as that of the world's children, who are our collective future. From my hospital bed, I would like to share some personal concerns.

As the United States rethinks its social and foreign aid policies, we must ensure that children — American children and the poorest children in the world's poorest countries — are not caught in the political cross fire. Bipartisanship for children has worked well in the past; it can work now.

To ensure that their well-being is not inadvertently sacrificed to partisan or ideological interests, Americans must reaffirm that children constitute a special case requiring consistent bipartisan action and a first call on society's resources.

Four years ago, the World Summit for Children set ambitious goals: a major reduction in child deaths; a halving of child malnutrition; immunisation levels of 90 per cent; complete eradication of polio; an end to iodine deficiency, which causes most cases of preventable mental retardation; a drastic reduction in the number of children who go blind; an effective primary education for at least 80 per cent of girls as well as boys; clean water and safe sanitation for all communities; and universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Some of these goals were to be achieved by 1995, others by 2000. Most industrial nations have already achieved these targets. But in impoverished inner cities of wealthy and developing countries alike, reaching them is an urgent priority.

Achieving the goals will mean that some 2.5 million fewer children will die in 1996 than in 1990. Tens of millions will be spared the insidious sabotage wrought

Kuwait emb

By William MacLean

Reuter

KUWAIT — Kuwait's government and opposition are keeping one eye firmly on parliamentary elections next year as they square off for a high-stakes tussle over the economy.

Both have political hopes riding on the outcome of a dispute that could affect the economy for years and decide parliament's political complexion until the end of the century, analysts say.

The argument is about two intertwined issues. The first is how to settle \$20 billion in long-standing private debts held over by a few thousand wealthy individuals and companies.

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Some of these goals were to be achieved by 1995, others by 2000. Most industrial nations have already achieved these targets. But in impoverished inner cities of wealthy and developing countries alike, reaching them is an urgent priority.

Achieving the goals will mean that some 2.5 million fewer children will die in 1996 than in 1990. Tens of millions will be spared the insidious sabotage wrought

on their development by malnutrition. At least 750,000 fewer children each year will be disabled, crippled or mentally retarded.

Achievement of the 1995 targets will pave the way towards meeting the broader goals set for 2000, proving that it is possible to eradicate some of poverty's worst manifestations available to all.

That daring dream is even more practical today.

If, through a failure of nerve, an impulse of selfishness, a confusion of priorities, a loss of self-confidence, we deny that dream and walk into the 21st century looking backward, humankind will pay for its shortsightedness in spades.

The United States has provided enormous leadership to U.N. development efforts at many critical junctures — from John Kennedy's launching of the First Development Decade to U.S. hacking of smallpox eradication — and I am sure that U.S. leadership will continue to play a vital role in the future.

By continuing to invest in American children and strengthening families, and by ensuring that foreign assistance makes a difference in the lives of the world's poorest children, the United States, as the world's sole superpower, will once more set the global standard and give a major boost to human development and economic growth at home and abroad.

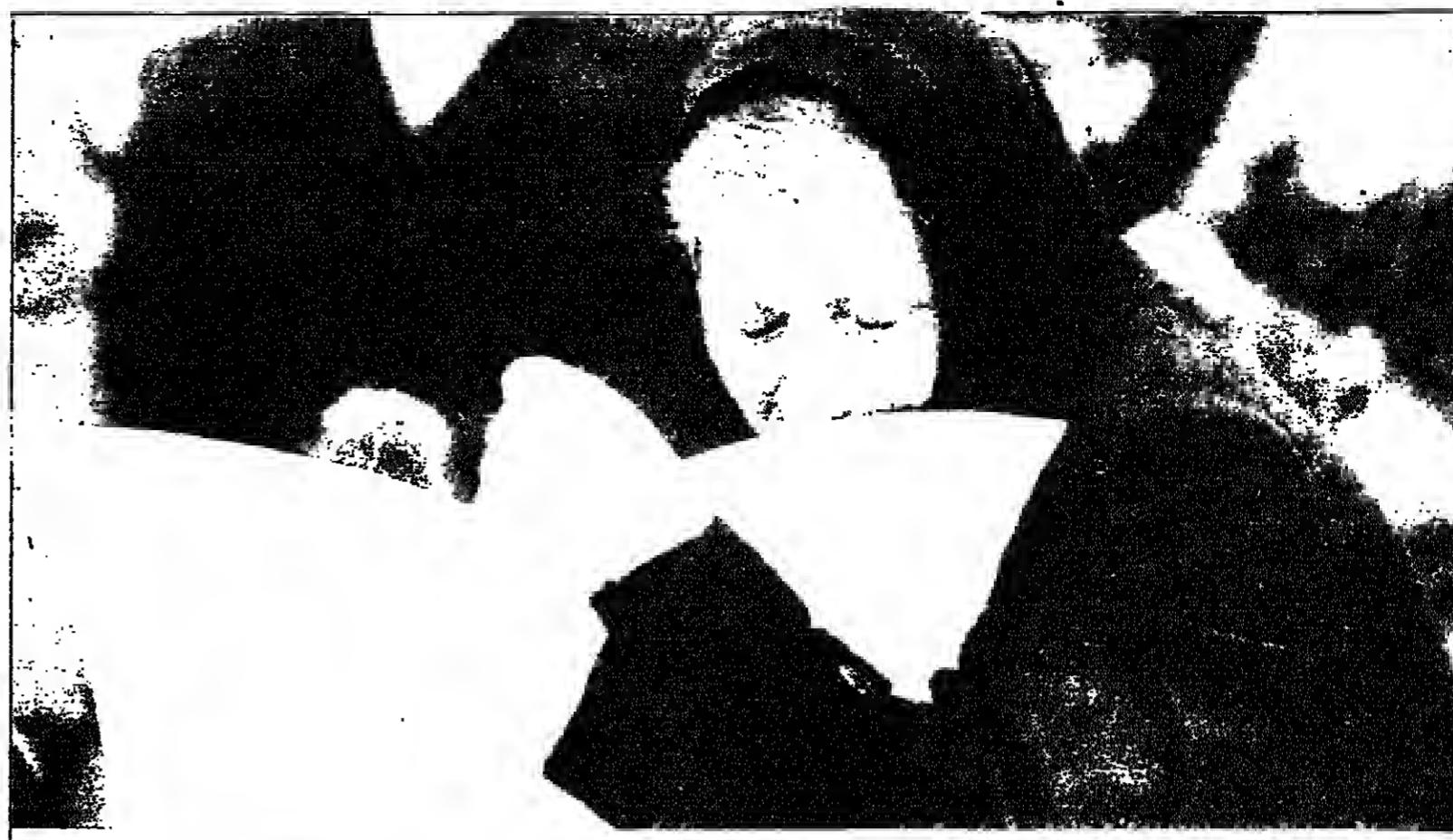
Surveys in the industrialized countries show continuing support for aid and development — if that aid and development are focused on the poorest, and help people to help themselves. Politicians in both U.S. parties need to make it unthinkable for a country like America to turn its back on children and people with no one to turn to.

Over the years I have seen bow governments, opposing political parties, even armed adversaries, as well as the business sector, nongovernmental organizations and local communities, work together for human progress — first and foremost for children. Let us all face forward towards the children, our collective future.

The task now for rich countries and poor is to get behind this momentum for change, to push towards the achievement of the great goals that have been set for the year 2000, and to overcome the worst aspects of poverty on the planet.

More than a half-century

International Herald Tribune.



A Bosnian Muslim old woman cries in agony over the suffering the war has caused her (AFP photo)

Old people wait for the end — of the war, or their lives

By Samir Kadic

The Associated Press

SARAJEVO — Crammed onto one floor of a former school, dozens of elderly Bosnians silently await the end of the war, or their lives, whichever comes first.

The makeshift old people's home was set up in August 1993 in a shell-shattered school building several hundred yards from the front line. It shelters 64 sick and old people with no one to turn to.

One doctor, five nurses, four orderlies and a social worker try to cope with the needs of both their live-in charges and 150 other elderly people, many living on their own.

Conditions are miserable. Many of the elderly are too sick or feeble to make it to the toilet, so they relieve themselves on the floor or in bed. Natural gas for heat is scarce, so rooms are often icy. For most, frugal meals of beans, lentils and rice are the only break in a day of staring at the walls.

The Red Cross contributes some canned food once a month. U.N. peacekeepers from France provide occasional favors — food, medicine, gasoline for the home's single car, and once old clothes donated by family members.

Local charities have been able to help out with aid only three times since the home started.

"What they get is not nearly enough," said Nina Wingquist, a Red Cross representative.

Dobrila Mulina, 70, a 70-year-old retired biscuit professor, spends her days in the smelly, narrow corridor.

Sitting in her wheelchair at a table packed with books, Ms. Mulina, affectionately known to her companions as "Seka" (sister), reads daily in an effort to escape the harsh reality of her life.

"I live in my isolated

little world of literature," she said, absently stroking her gray hair. "The apathy and the boredom of others around me makes me miserable and desperate."

Her resilience is all the more remarkable given her suffering — chronic diabetes forced doctors to recently amputate her right leg because increasingly poor circulation led to the threat of gangrene.

A daily shot of insulin each morning helps her relax and begin her day's reading.

She prefers the dark corridor to the room she shares with nine other women, most of them so sick they rarely leave their beds. Despite a broken window, stale air is heavy in the overcrowded room.

Without a single television or a radio for entertainment, the day ends with the onset of dusk.

"I take a sleeping pill so as not to think about the past, the present, and the grim future," Ms. Mulina

said. She clings to hope that once the war is over, her daughter and grandchildren, who live in Liverpool, England, will come to take her away from the misery.

If she lives that long, Old age or sickness have killed 41 people at the home during the 18 months she has been there.

"Death is at home here," she said. "We are never sure what will come first — our end or the end of the war."

Others too are gloomy, the misery of daily existence compounded by the suffering they were exposed to before landing here.

Asia Smajlovic, 81, takes solace in religion. Her only son was killed at the beginning of the war in her hometown of Visegrad, 120 kilometers east of Sarajevo. She fled Bosnian Serbs soon afterward, leaving her house, cattle and life behind. She moved in after finding temporary shelter in a refugee camp.

Beni nearly double by age, she manages to walk five times a day downstairs for water for her ritual wash-up before prayers. Low water pressure means taps and toilet bowls on the second floor are dry.

Ahmed Jahic, 69, fled with his family from Rogatica, 55 kilometers east of Sarajevo, when Serbs captured it at the beginning of the war.

The Jahics left for Zepa, an eastern enclave held by the Muslim-dominated government. Mr. Jahic was seriously wounded by a shell and was evacuated by the United Nations to Zenica for medical treatment, while his wife and two daughters stayed behind.

Unable to return to the besieged enclave, Mr. Jahic came to Sarajevo where he was left to fend for himself.

"If the officials here in the home hadn't allowed me to stay I would have died," Mr. Jahic said. "All I want is to see my family one more time before I die."

Kuwait embarks on high-stakes economic tussle

By William MacLean
Reuter

KUWAIT — Kuwait's government and opposition are keeping one eye firmly on parliamentary elections next year as they square off for a high-stakes tussle over the economy.

Both have political bopes riding on the outcome of a dispute that could affect the economy for years and decide parliament's political complexion until the end of the century, analysts say.

The argument is about two intertwined issues. The first is how to settle \$20 billion in long-standing private sector bad debt owed by a few thousand wealthy individuals and companies.

The government has sparked parliamentary fury by suggesting debtors be allowed softer terms of settlement to end a problem that has enfeebled the banking system for a decade.

The other issue is a government call for Kuwaitis to start paying fees for heavily subsidised public services to

curb a budget deficit that is slowly eating away the state's reserves.

Diplomats say the dispute pits the considerable influence of large merchant families against the expectations of ordinary Kuwaitis used to one of the world's most lavish welfare states.

Income tax is unknown, gasoline is cheaper than bottled water and civil servants retire on full pension after 20 years' work or less — expensive measures at a time of low oil prices.

Lawmakers say Kuwaitis will be willing to start paying fees or taxes only when the debtors — regarded by many people as among the wealthiest in society — pay their obligations.

The lawmakers, already angry over the loss through alleged graft and mismanagement of more than \$5 billion of public money invested abroad in recent years, strongly oppose giving even more lenient debt settlement terms to the wealthy.

Deputy Nasser Al Sanea

said softer terms would cost the treasury 1.6 billion dinars (\$5.3 billion). He said the original settlement terms set in 1993 and described by bankers as already rather generous, would earn it a tidy 2.4 billion (\$8 billion) — 60 per cent larger than this fiscal year's budget deficit.

Big merchants argue settlement under the original terms would trigger a property and stock price crash.

In October 1996 Kuwait will hold polls for the next four-year parliamentary term and both pro-government and opposition MPs are expected to court voters with promises of handouts.

While the prime minister by tradition is always the crown prince and a member of the ruling Sabah family, elections determine the political complexion of the legislature and thereby to some degree also the emir's political stability.

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Saudi budget deficit slashed to 3.3 per cent of GDP study

ABU DHABI (AFP) — Saudi Arabia has slashed its projected 1995 budget deficit to around 3.3 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) pressing ahead with reforms to offset losses from low crude prices, a Saudi bank study said Tuesday.

But the cut in spending, which followed unprecedented advice by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has cost it in terms of economic growth, according to the study by Henry Azzam, chief economist at the National Commercial Bank (NCB), the biggest bank in Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Azzam said the 1995 deficit was more than halved to 15 billion riyals (\$4 billion) from 40 billion riyals (\$10.6 billion) in 1994.

This came after expenditure was trimmed by 6.2 per cent to 150 billion riyals (\$40 billion) from 160 billion riyals (\$42.6 billion).

"It is projected that the deficit in 1995 accounted for 3.3 per cent compared with 8.8 per cent in 1994," he said in the study, published in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) newspaper Al Khaleej.

Saudi Arabia, which controls more than a quarter of the world's proven oil reserves, has been under press-

ure from the IMF to lower its deficit after it soared to serious levels after a drop in crude prices and large cash contributions to the 1991 Gulf war.

The deficit began to appear in the mid-1980s because of the lower oil prices and production and jumped to a record \$33.6 billion in 1991 due to payments for the liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi invasion forces.

It accounted for as high as 28.5 per cent of the 1991 GDP but eased in the following years.

The deficit has forced the kingdom to borrow from the local and foreign markets and withdraw from its overseas reserves, believed to have declined to less than half their level in the mid-1980s.

Mr. Azzam expected Saudi Arabia to earn less from oil exports this year due to lower prices but said the fall would be offset by a hike in prices of petroleum products, internal flights and telephone, water and electricity rates.

He projected earnings from petroleum products to reach eight billion riyals (\$2.13 billion), raising total oil sales to around \$24.8 billion. The remaining revenue would come from non-oil sources, he added.

"This deficit could be financed through local sources

without any impact on credits to the private sector as there are no plans to borrow from abroad," he said. "Previous borrowing has not affected bank liquidity as credits extended by banks to the government have not exceeded 25 per cent of their assets."

Mr. Azzam said the reduction in the 1995 budget, the second in two years, "mainly affected defence, subsidies, debt repayment and projects."

Defence expenditure, which received the lion's share of the budget, was cut by 7.5 per cent to 49.5 billion riyals (\$13.2 billion) while allocations for subsidies and debt repayments were slashed by 29.9 per cent to 35.2 billion riyals (\$9.38 billion).

The remaining sectors got around 5.2 billion riyals (\$1.38 billion), a decline of nearly 11.8 per cent.

Mr. Azzam forecast a decline in the 1995 GDP to 446.4 billion riyals (\$11.19 billion) from 453.2 billion riyals (\$120.8 billion).

"The decline came after several years of growth caused by a surge in the private sector, which is relying less on government spending as the country is pressing on with restructuring the economy," he said.

Report: Arabs lost \$12b in U.S. investment

ABU DHABI (AFP) — Arab states lost nearly \$12 billion in their investments in the United States last year because of a decline in stocks and the dollar, a United Arab Emirates (UAE) official said.

Said Al Jarwan, director of the Sharjah chamber of commerce and industry, said Arab investors had around \$90 billion in U.S. equities and stocks, or nearly 13.4 per cent of their total investment in the United States.

"Economic experts estimate the Arab investment losses in the U.S. financial markets at around \$12 billion by the end of 1994 due to a decline in stocks, bonds and the dollar rate," he said Tuesday in Al Khaleej newspaper.

The decline was caused by Washington's decision to raise interest rates on short term deposits six times to 5.5 per cent from 3.5 per cent, he said.

Mr. Jarwan gave no figures for the total Arab investment in the United States but official figures show the U.S.-based assets of Saudi Arabia and its five partners in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) exceed \$400 billion.

They account for nearly half the estimated overseas Arab funds of more than \$800 billion, invested mostly in the West in equities, real estate and bank deposits. Personal deposits are put at more than \$100 billion.

Mr. Jarwan was commenting on the low-intensity Arab investment, which is estimated by the Arab Corporation for Guaranteeing Investment at around \$12.2 billion, a fraction of their overseas assets.

"There should be a joint Arab action to repatriate the huge overseas Arab funds, which are exploited by non-Arab capitals. They could be used to develop regional economies and serve domestic development," he said.

"Those funds face the risk of being nationalised or frozen, which has become possible at any time when there is a rift between us and the countries where we have deposits. This has happened more than once."

The increase should go into effect from the start of the Iranian new year on March 21, he said.

The average wage of an Iranian worker is about 200,000 riyals (less than \$50) a month.

German central bank says moderate raises condition for smooth growth

FRANKFURT (AFP) — Germany should be able to continue recording smooth growth, the Bundesbank says, while stressing the need for moderate salary increases to ensure this, and reduce unemployment.

In its monthly report for February, the central bank says there remain risk factors in the United States last year because of a decline in stocks and the dollar, a United Arab Emirates (UAE) official said.

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Business Daily Beat

A review of economic news from the Arabic press

Major firm outlines big projects for Palestine

The Palestinian Company for Development and Investment (PCDI) has received preliminary approval from the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to begin the procedures for founding a Palestinian stock exchange. At present, both sides are cooperating in laying down the necessary legislation especially with regard to registering brokers and other managerial, legal and technical aspects.

PCDI Chairman Kamal Al Shaer said the company was in contact with the management of the Amman Financial Market (AFM) and the concerned authorities in Jordan to list Palestinian stock on the AFM and the Jordanian stock on the Palestinian stock exchange, when it is established. The PCDI believes that both the Jordanian and the Palestinian markets are one market, he said.

Dr. Shaer emphasised the importance of having a secondary market in Palestine. It is a basic condition to mobilise capital and provide opportunities to put the Palestinian economy in motion, he said. A secondary market would help in establishing public shareholding companies and in providing an opportunity to trade their shares, he said.

Dr. Shaer said the Palestinian Company for Industrial Investment (PCII), which was set up by the holding company PCDI, would have its operations cover all of the West Bank and Gaza. The PCII's first project will be planning and designing industrial cities on lands to be assigned to it by the PNA to encourage setting up industries in areas having the necessary facilities.

The PCII general assembly is expected to hold a meeting soon.

PCDI had recently established two companies: Al Quds Company for Tourism and Investment is headed by Khalil Al Talhouni and is based in Jerusalem, and the other is the Palestine Company for Real Estate Investment headed by Nabil Al Sarraf and based in Gaza.

According to Dr. Shaer, the PCDI activities are two-pronged. First, the activities that the private sector undertakes and, second, the services that are usually carried out by the public sector in some countries such as electric power and communications among others.

Dr. Shaer revealed that during discussions with the PNA, the company made a comprehensive offer to build a 160-megawatt electric power station in Gaza and was given the green light to prepare the technical, economic and financial studies needed for the project.

As such, PCDI is now in the process of setting up a Palestinian public shareholding company to build, manage and operate the electric power project in which the Jordan Electric Power Co. and the International Finance Corporation have agreed to invest in its equity.

The PCDI chairman expects to submit to the PNA a detailed offer before the end of April 1995 at an estimated cost of \$140 million.

Dr. Shaer said PCDI was preparing offers to build the necessary facilities for the Gaza port such as a free zone, an industrial zone, warehouses and storage areas, management premises and maintenance workshops.

In the telecommunications field, he said, PCDI will set up a shareholding company to build, operate and develop a telecommunications network in Palestine in partnership with an international firm to be selected at a later stage.

Dr. Shaer stressed that the PCDI "works on the basis that the ties between the Jordanian and Palestinian economies will be accompanied by a gradual programme and practical steps that would lead to an open market with neighbouring Arab countries."

Asian crude oil prices highest in the world

SINGAPORE (Agencies) — Asian crude oil prices are the highest in the world, pulling up prices for some Middle East and African oil with them and squeezing Far East refining profits.

Malaysian Tapis crude oil, highly prized in booming Asia for its rich yield of transportation fuel, is being offered as high as \$19.20 per barrel for April loading, its strongest level since early August last year, oil traders said Tuesday.

The price of Indonesian Minas crude is being offered even higher at \$19.30 a barrel as Japan and China vie for scarce supplies. Minas is mainly burned by electric utilities but can also be refined.

In comparison, April North Sea Brent crude is fetching \$17.00 and U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude about \$18.60.

"Definitely Asian crude oil has become the costliest in the world and it is beginning to have a major impact on world oil markets," a trader said.

Indonesia has also diverted Heavy Minas and Duri crude to a new refinery. Japanese

with a major oil company in Singapore said. "Refiners are losing money running Asian barrels and are looking to cheaper Middle and African grades as replacements."

Refiners in Asia would lost 25 to 50 cents per barrel if they bought Tapis crude at current prices, sources estimated.

Crade from New Guinea, Australia and Indonesia used to be in ample supply if Tapis grew tight, sometimes at big discounts.

But less Asian crude is available now. Malaysia is running a new refinery flat out and production from Australia's Gippsland field is down by about 20 per cent in the last 18 months.

Moreover, weather-related problems at Indonesia's Bequia and Australia's Griffin oilfields this month have resulted in the loss of another 1.6 million barrels, traders said.

Indonesia has also diverted Heavy Minas and Duri crude to a new refinery. Japanese

buyers, perhaps fearing another hot dry summer, have been vying with China for the remaining supplies, driving Minas premiums to a dollar over the official price.

Many Asian refiners have already turned to cheaper sources from outside the region to fill the supply gap.

Record amounts of African oil, conservatively estimated at 35 million barrels, have sold into Asia in 1995, mainly for Korea but also to Japan, China, Thailand, Taiwan and Indonesia.

U.S. and European refiners have frequently found themselves in tough bidding wars with Asian refiners, pushing African oil prices higher. Angola's Cabinda crude, for example, is being discussed at dated Brent minus 50 cents compared with dated Brent minus one dollar at times last year.

Some refiners are also turning to low sulphur Middle East crudes like Yemen's Masila as alternative.

Taking advantage of strong

demand and rising prices, Yemen this week raised its second quarter term Masila price to dated Brent minus 25 cents from minus 65 cents in the first quarter.

Buyers hope the squeeze will end soon as North Asian refiners begin seasonal maintenance shutdowns.

"This rally has got to end soon," one refiner said. He noted that Tapis prices typically begin falling around March as refiners close down units for turnarounds and kerosene demand drops as the northern hemisphere's winter ends.

A recent Reuter survey, however, found Japanese shutdowns will not peak until June and July. South Korean refinery shutdowns will run from May until July.

"Refinery turnarounds will be key to the price outlook for light low sulphur crude in the next few weeks," one Asian trader said. "Chinese demand will be more important for heavy sweet (Indone-

sian) grades."

Meanwhile, Singapore hopes to capture many of the Asian investors in Brent Crude futures when the Singapore International Monetary Exchange (SIMEX) begins trading the oil contract in June, officials said Tuesday.

The officials said that SIMEX will trade Brent Crude futures under a tie-up with the International Petroleum Exchange of London Ltd. (IPE) with trading hours extended through the Asian business day to encourage more dealing from this part of the world.

SIMEX officials said that they initially hope to attract 8.8 per cent of current IPE trade originating from Asia Pacific.

"There are close to 5,000 contracts a day from this part of the world done through brokers (in London)," said Lim Thim Poh, a SIMEX director and managing director of B.P. Singapore Pte. Ltd.

Jordan, France negotiating terms of \$100 million debt-equity swap

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

the country at a discounted rate.

According to the officials, Jordanian debt are now available in the market with about 33 per cent discount and the negotiations with the Central Bank of Jordan aimed at setting at a slightly higher discount for debt-equity swap.

The officials, who did not want to be identified, said the negotiations were launched after the two governments signed an agreement late last year under which about \$200 million of Jordan's debts to France were also rescheduled.

The

debt rescheduling

accord was part of an agreement that Jordan reached with the Paris Club of creditor governments in June. The broad accord covered \$1.215 billion of Jordan's debts.

France holds about \$1 billion of Jordan's total foreign debts, which outgoing finance minister Sami Gammoh put at \$5.5 billion in early January.

About one-third of Jordan's dues to France is outstanding lease payments on Royal Jordanian aircraft and does not qualify for any special treatment. Of the rest, about \$350 million have been rescheduled, including the amount covered in last year's accord.

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Ex-Soviet republics cooperate to maintain elite athletic standards

MOSCOW (AFP) — The Russians lost more than Sergey Bubka and a handful of other stars when the Soviet Union collapsed four years ago.

The flight of talent to newly independent republics — the Ukraine in polevaulter Bubka's case — was the first shock for Bokomport, the central committee that built the Soviet Union into a post-war sports super power.

A second blow was lack of funds as sport slipped down the priority list in a country gripped by an economic crisis.

A more long-term effect is only now being fully appreciated. The break-up of the Soviet Union cut Russia off from training centres spread across the former empire — the cradles of Moscow's sporting greatness.

These training centres are essential if Russia is to continue to produce elite athletes, so Moscow is desperate to keep them back.

Last month, the plan started to fall into place when nine of the 15 former Soviet republics, at the behest of Moscow, met to form an association to foster sporting co-operation.

The National Olympic Committees of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Russia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan pledged their support and Latvia and Belarus sent observers.

Vitaly Smirnov, the 60-year-old president of the Russian Olympic Committee, was appointed head of the new organisation and has made no secret of his ambitions.

The main goal, he said, was to maintain the positions of the former Soviet Union in sport.

The common use of sports facilities was high on the agenda, with the Russian especially interested in what the vice-president of the Armenian Olympic Committee, Razmik Stepanian, had to say.

Generations of elite Soviet athletes have passed through Tzakhkadzor — a high-altitude training centre in Armenia, whose facilities are unmatched and sorely missed by Russian competitors today.

"Tzakhkadzor is the best facility we ever had in the old Soviet Union," said Anatoly Kolesov, the head of the

Russian delegation for the 1996 Atlanta Games. "The entire country (Soviet Union) was responsible for building this centre."

Tzakhkadzor, built in 1968, is equipped for the training of athletes in all Olympic sports, all year around.

When the Soviet empire collapsed in December 1991, Russian athletes lost the opportunity to train there.

Armenia's war with neighbouring Azerbaijan, whose facilities have suffered damage and neglect.

There is hope, though. Stepanian has promised that the training centre will be re-opened to the Russians once more and Kolesov said that he will visit the centre in May.

"At the moment, we are forced to train in Krasnodar (Russia) or travel to Bulgaria. We end up spending a lot more money than we would at Tzakhkadzor. The Armenians have offered us to train there at the price of 15 U.S. dollars per person per day," said Kolesov.

Russian rowers have lost their training centre in Mengechur, Azerbaijan, and athletes have been deprived of their base at Sukhumi in Abkhazia.

"We came to the conclusion that by helping each other, we can become a much bigger force at the Olympics," said Vladimir Vasin, the 1972 Olympic gold medallist in diving and now the first vice president of the Russian Olympic Committee.

"It is impossible to survive without integrating our efforts, our scientific base, our knowledge and experience in training world-class athletes. I am convinced that in the future, others such as Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic states will join our association," he added.

Irina Privalova, the Russian sprint star, still trains on a dilapidated Moscow university track but continues her yearly altitude training sessions in April in the Caucasus.

But even that venue in Kislovodsk is under threat, only 70 kilometres away from Grozny, the Chechen capital and centre of a war zone.

Arsenal manager sacked

LONDON (AFP) — George Graham was sensationally sacked by Arsenal Tuesday after the club was informed of the results of the Premier League inquiry into illegal payments involving the transfer of players.

The end of Graham's Highbury reign, to most successful in the London club's history, was announced by chairman Peter Hill-Wood, who said that the manager had not acted "in the best interests of the club."

The disgraced Graham is said to have received an illicit payment of £285,000 following the £1.1 million transfer of Danish star John Jensen, from Brondby in 1992.

The announcement ended a glittering eight-and-a-half year tenure at Highbury, during which Graham has brought the club six trophies including victory in the European Cup Winners Cup last season.

A terse statement by the club read: "Arsenal Football Club have now been informed by the FA Premier League Inquiry of the results

of their investigations into alleged irregularities concerning certain transfers and the Board have concluded that Mr. Graham did not act in the best interests of the club."

The board have therefore terminated Mr. Graham's contract as manager.

The chairman said that it was sad that Mr. Graham's distinguished career with Arsenal FC should have to end in this way and he paid tribute to Mr. Graham for the success that he had brought to the club over the past eight-and-a-half years."

Graham's dismissal comes at a crucial time in the club's disappointing season with Arsenal currently lying in the mid-table of the Premiership but only four points clear of the relegation zone.

In nine days the club will continue their defence of the European Cup Winners Cup in the first leg of their quarter-final tie against French side Auxerre.

Despite League and FA Cup disappointments, as Sheffield Wednesday are beaten in both finals.

Sampras coming back to Queen's

LONDON (Agencies) — Two-time Wimbledon champion Pete Sampras will make his sixth consecutive appearance at the Queen's Club grass-court tournament on June 12-18.

Todd Martin, who beat Sampras in last year's final, has also committed to play in the most prestigious of the Wimbledon warmup events, organisers said Monday.

Other entries include Goran Ivanisevic, Stefan Edberg, Wayne Ferreira and Patrick Rafter.

The total purse, 403,000 pounds (\$625,000), is unchanged from last year.

Queen's has been working on ways to slow down the

game. The grass at the venerable London venue is faster than that at Wimbledon, and the last two finals — Michael Stich over Ferreira in 1993 and Martin over Sampras last year — contained no breaks of serve.

Berasategui fights back

In Stuttgart, French Open finalist Alberto Berasategui came back from a slow start to defeat France's Olivier Delaître in the first round of the ATP \$2.125 million indoor tournament.

The institute already employs former East German Heike Sädwedel for road cycling, Russian Gennadi Turetski for swimming, Romanian Reinhold Haschka for rowing and China's Ju-Ping Tian for women's gymnastics.

Before the Soviet Union's break-up, its athletes dominated the Olympic medal tally and Russia appears to be continuing the tradition if its recent sporting successes are a guide.

The Australian government already allocates substantial funding to sporting development through the Institute of Sport, which has specialist academies in Canberra and a number of other centres.

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NBA giants remain centre of attention

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Role changes cannot stop them. Opponents barely slow them. Even comparisons to past heroes cannot diminish their achievements.

They are the giants of the National Basketball Association (NBA), a group of centers who have dominated the league like no other tall men before them. Even after rule changes this year to emphasize guard play, these goliaths

Nigerian-born Hakeem Olajuwon and Jamaican native Patrick Ewing sparked the trend. Shaquille O'Neal, David Robinson and Zaire's Dikembe Mutombo followed with Alonso Mourning and Dutchman Rik Smits putting themselves in title contention.

NBA officials, bearing complaints that centers were becoming too dominant, shortened the three-point line and tightened defensive rules to encourage play away from the basket. But pre-game scoring has remained unchanged and centers remain the top scorers.

"There are just a lot of talented players out there in the middle," Robinson said. "It goes in cycles. This is our time."

The retirements of Michael Jordan and Magic Johnson ended an era for flashy guards and the big men have inherited the throne. None has been more impressive than Orlando's O'Neal, a dunking dynamo whose 29.5 points a game leads the NBA.

"He is having a sensational season," Robinson said. "Most people can't see the little ways in which his game has stepped up from last season."

The Magic are title contenders with O'Neal being supported by the rebounding of forward Horace Grant and the outside play of guard Anfernee Hardaway.

"You've got to say Shaq is the MVP," Hardaway said. "He's the leading scorer. We would not be the same team without him."

Many have compared Shaq and "Penny" to the NBA's greatest 1980s tandem, Magic Johnson and centre Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. But the ex-Laker star and newest Hall of Fame inductee thinks Shaq has a way to go yet.

"Magic and I had already won national college titles before we even made it to the NBA. These guys haven't," Abdul-Jabbar said. "They have plenty of time. They will make their own statement."

Olajuwon already has. He was voted last season's Most Valuable Player after leading Houston to the NBA crown.

He ranks second in scoring with 28.2 points with Robinson third at 27.6 points.

"Hakeem is the best center in the league. I'm not," O'Neal said. "I'm probably second or third or even fourth."

Ewing rates seventh in scoring at 22.8 but his 11.5 rebounds are the best of the top scorers. Olajuwon averages 11.1 and O'Neal 10.7 a game.

"It's always hard to play against him," Olajuwon said. "He's not just playing for himself. He wants to win, like me."

The Knicks beat Houston 122-117 on Sunday, completing a season sweep of the club which beat them in last year's championship series. Ewing had 31 points to 24 for Olajuwon. Both had nine rebounds.

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NBA leaders

NEW YORK (AP) — The NBA individual scoring, rebounding and assist leaders through Feb. 19:

SCORING

	FG	FT	AVG
O'Neal, Orlando	587	300	29.5
Olajuwon, Houston	546	290	28.2
Robinson, S. Antonio	445	404	27.6
Malone, Utah	515	314	26.0
Jackson, Dallas	459	294	25.9
Mashburn, Dallas	419	262	24.4
Ewing, N.Y.	433	249	22.8
Richmond, Sacramento	390	212	22.5
Ceballos, L.A. Lakers	352	149	22.0
Sprewell, G. State	336	226	21.7
Drexler, Por.-Hou.	319	215	21.4
Pippen, Chicago	385	207	21.4
C. Robinson, Portland	386	191	21.4
Rider, Minnesota	380	197	21.1
Robinson, Milwaukee	391	217	20.9
Rice, Miami	375	171	20.7
Barros, Philadelphia	357	216	20.6
Hardaway, Orlando	373	227	20.6
Payton, Seattle	395	158	20.2
Mourning, Charlotte	331	276	20.0

REBOUNDING

	OFF	DEF	AVG
Rodman, S.A.	168	318	16.2
Mutombo, Denver	204	454	13.2
Hill, Cleveland	196	334	11.5
Ewing, N.Y.	105	457	11.5
Olajuwon, Houston	115	427	11.1
Willis, Atl.-Ga.	145	329	11.0
Robinson, S.A.	127	381	10.8
O'Neal, Orlando	192	344	10.7
Jones, Dallas	190	294	10.5
Dudley, Portland	216	291	10.3
Malone, Utah	110	425	10.3

ASSISTS

	NO	AVG
Stockton, Utah	644	12.4
Anderson, N.J.	449	10.2
Bogues, Char.	470	9.4
Hardwick, G.S.	448	9.1
Strickland, Port.	332	8.7
Van Exel, L.A.	394	8.4
Richardson, L.A.	407	8.3
Johnson, S.A.	390	8.1
Blaylock, Atl.	385	7.5
Kidd, Dall.	343	7.5

Magic explode 152-104 over Bucks

CHARLOTTE (Agencies) — Shaquille O'Neal scored 30 points and Antefree Hardaway added 25 as Orlando established the largest margin of victory in team history, thrashing the Milwaukee Bucks 152-104.

O'Neal scored 19 of his points in the first half as the Magic snapped a four-game road losing streak.

Orlando beat Philadelphia 129-83 last Friday for the previous record and was only three points shy of tying the team record for points in a game. The Magic beat the Utah Jazz 155-116 on December 30, 1990.

Todd Day and Gienn Robinson each had 22 points as the Bucks tied a club record for largest margin in a defeat that was set in a 144-96 loss to the Jazz on Jan. 27, 1990.

Lakers 108, Supersonics 105: At Tacoma, Washington, Nicky Van Exel scored a career-high 40 points, including seven 3-pointers, as Los Angeles beat Seattle for the fourth straight time this season.

Los Angeles led 100-93 before the Supersonics trimmed the deficit to 100-98 with 1:22 left.

However, Van Exel made three free throws in the final 15.9 seconds to stave off Seattle.

Detlef Schrempf led the Sonics with 26 points and Shawn Kemp had 25 points and 14 rebounds.

Vlade Divac added 19 points and eight assists for Los Angeles.

Warriors 98, 76ers 85: At Oakland, California, Tim Hardaway scored 21 points and Donyell Marshall had 14 in his Golden State debut. Marshall, acquired Saturday from Minnesota for Tom Gugliotta, had eight of his points in the second quarter when the Warriors took the lead for good.

Dana Barros scored 26 points to lead Philadelphia, and Scott Williams had a career-high 20 rebounds to go with his 17 points.

Latrell Sprewell, with 17 points, was among six Warriors in double figures as new Golden State coach Bob Lanier got his second win since taking over for Don Nelson a week ago.

Hornets 115, Bulls 104: The Charlotte Hornets held Chicago to a franchise-low nine points in the third quarter and rallied from a 19-point deficit to beat the Bulls 115-104 on Monday night.

Scott Burrell, Hersey Hawkins and Larry Johnson scored 23 points each, and the Hornets established a team record for fewest points allowed in a quarter.

Chicago led 60-43 at half-time and built its lead in the third quarter. But the Bulls were 4-for-14 shooting in the quarter and committed 14 turnovers as they were outscored 35-9.

Charlotte closed the final



No. 1 overall NBA draft pick Glenn Robinson of the Milwaukee Bucks #13 jams the ball over an opponent (AP photo)

make a two-point basket for the final 7:37 of the third quarter and first 9:15 of the fourth. Cleveland was 6-for-30 on two-point field goals in the second half.

Pistons 99, Kings 93: At Auburn Hills, Michigan, Joe Dumars completed a four-point play to break a late tie as Detroit broke a three-game losing streak.

Spud Webb hit his tenth straight shot to make it 87-87 with 3:12 to go, and after the teams traded baskets, Dumars hit a 3-pointer from the right corner as he was fouled by Mitch Richmond. Dumars, who finished with 14 points, made the free throw to complete the rare four-point play.

University Games

Japan and U.S. join the gold rush

Zakopane put a brave face on his defeat.

"I didn't feel on top of things during the warm-up," he said, "so I'm happy with what I accomplished."

"It's nice to have held on to the same title, and second out of 23 is not bad." But he

added: "I'll put it behind me and move on."

Anna Larionova gave Russia second victory of the Games — after Sunday's one-

two finish in the women's 10km cross country — winning a rare Alpine gold medal.

Japan's ski jumpers dominated the 90m hill event at Astun, with Yukita Fukita winning the gold medal.

Hiroki Vesugi the bronze and Noritaka Kasama taking fifth place.

But hours later, the Americans went one better with Michael Weiss and Damon Allen completing a one-two finish for the States in the men's figure skating at Sabina-nation.

The pair ousted China's Zhang Min, who had been leading after Sunday night's short programme but who had to settle for bronze.

The Japanese ski jumpers, who allowed Slovenia's Franci Petek to take the silver, showed the skills which have seen their country combined athletes take charge of the World Cup in recent years.

With a points total of 240, Fukita, who won the large hill event at the Zakopane Games two years ago, was comfortably clear of Petek (235.5), with Vesugi polling 226.5.

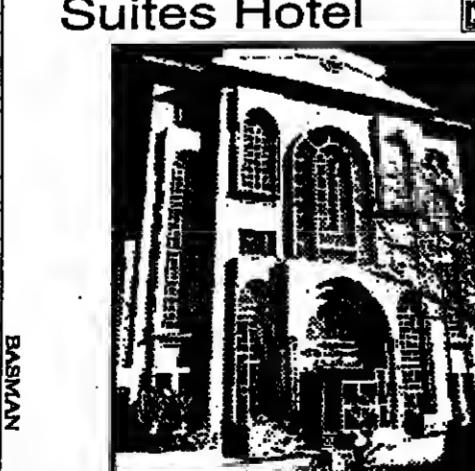
Weiss, who had been lying third behind Allen and Zhang after the short programme, gave a highly polished performance after both of his rivals had bungled landings in the free section.

"It was good and clean and I got the job done that I had to do," said Weiss.

"I knew I was one of the best skating here and I feel that I can compete with the best in the world. I hope I can go on to do as well if not better."

Allen, who also won the silver medal two years ago at

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Russians seize control of last road into Grozny

LKHAN-YURT, Russia (Agencies) — Russian forces Tuesday made their biggest advance in three weeks in Chechnya, seizing control of the last road leading into the capital Grozny.

The movement in effect cut off the last Chechen separatists still holding positions in southern Grozny from their rear base.

Reporters at the scene saw a score of Russian tanks push forward to the village of Alkan-Yurt, seven kilometres southwest of Grozny, and take control of the Baku to Rostov-on-the-Don road, formerly held by Chechen rebels.

Earlier rebels were seen rapidly retreating in cars and four-wheel-drive vehicles.

Russian infantry troops also entered Alkan-Yurt where they exchanged automatic weapons fire with separatists holding the village.

Chechen Information Minister Movladi Udgov said military activity had died down by 11 a.m. (0800 GMT) after Russian forces failed to make a breakthrough in Chechen lines.

At least four Russian tanks also took up positions two kilometres north of the village of Gotti, 10 kilometres south of Grozny, residents there said.

They said the tanks had surrounded a separatist position, which they were pounding with artillery fire.

The Russian moves will effectively give Moscow's troops control over all roads into the capital along a 15-kilometre span.

The Chechen separatist commander in charge of the Alkan-Yurt sector, Dok Makhayev, said the tank movements were "preparing a major Russian offensive in all directions later Tuesday night."

Further north, between Alkan-Yurt and Kirov, fierce fighting raged Tuesday with the Russian army seeking to cut off access to Grozny from the west.

The large-scale attacks ended a relative lull in the 10-week conflict which a human rights body said had

killed more than 24,000 civilians.

A report, prepared by experts working for Russian human rights commissioner Sergei Kovaylov, said the scale of civilian deaths was comparable only with Poland in World War II.

Warplanes bombed Chechen units in the localities of Gudermes, Argun and Samashki and Russian forces also struck at Chechen positions in the Promylosky district on Grozny's northwest rim on Tuesday, Itar-Tass news agency said.

The Chechens confirmed fresh clashes, saying Russian forces had launched an offensive with tanks, artillery and warplanes in areas south of the city at around 5 a.m. (0200 GMT).

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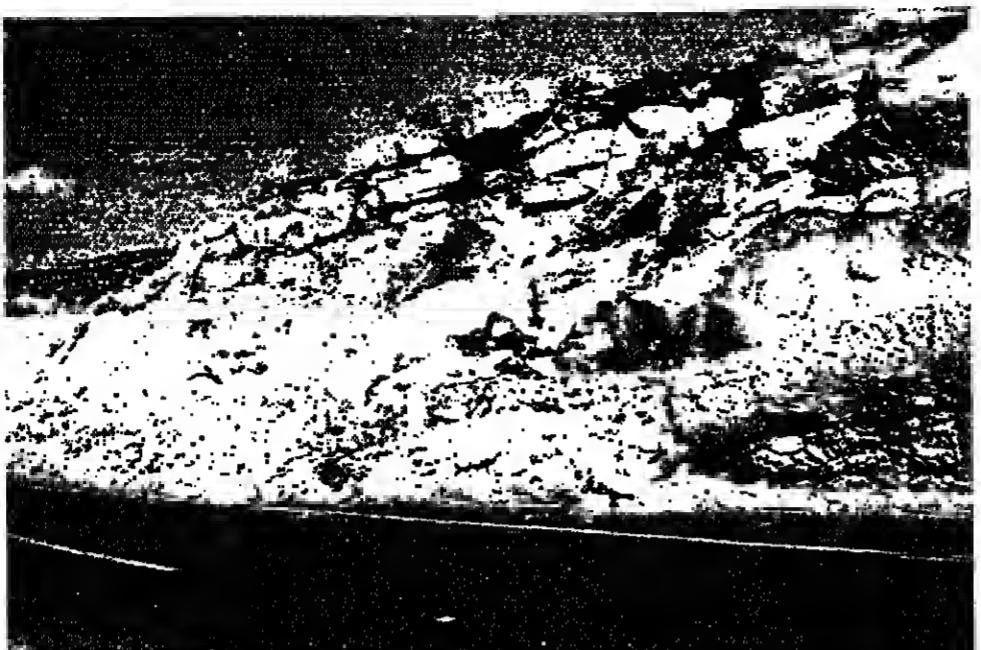
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(Continued on page 3)



Precariously perched boulders slowly but steadily sliding towards the main Amman-Jerash highway (Photo by Rana Husseini)

Huge rocks sliding towards main Amman-Jerash highway

By Rana Husseini
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A massive boulder is slowly sliding towards the main Amman-Jerash highway from the hillside adjoining the road and nothing could be done to stop the movement, officials said Tuesday.

The landslide started early Monday, causing rocks to fall on the road and hindering traffic for about two hours, police said.

But he was also quoted by Interfax news agency as saying aerial attacks, some involving high-altitude bombing raids, were continuing in southern districts of the devastated capital as well as Argun, just to the east, at midday.

Mr. Udgov also said Chechen fighters had shot down a Sukhoi-25 fighter plane early on Tuesday between the southern districts of Chechen-aul and Starie Atagi. But Interfax news agency quoted an air force official as denying this.

Chechen shot down a Sukhoi-27 in the area on Feb. 4.

New military activity had been widely expected following pledges by Russian military officials to crush rebel resistance after the expiry of a four-day ceasefire on Sunday night.

"There is nothing that could stop it, and we are waiting to see what will happen after the mass stops moving," the minister told the Jordan Times.

He said the landslide stemmed from the weakness of clay which forms layers be-

tween rocks.

"When the water level in the clay increased, it led to imbalance between the layers, causing the stone layer to split and start sliding," Dr. Ensour said.

A team of experts was keeping a round-the-clock monitoring of the area. Two lanes of the highway were closed immediately after Tuesday morning's slide and the other two lanes were open late Tuesday.

Dr. Ensour said a landslide occurred in the same area while work was under way on the same highway in 1992.

"A visiting American team proposed solutions to solve the problem, but it required huge amounts of money and special equipment and we could not afford it," Dr. Ensour said.

The highway, which cost more than JD 40 million, was opened in March 1994 after seven years of work.

The project took so long to complete due to difficulties including landslides and financial constraints, officials said.

The highway shortened the distance from Amman to Irbid by 20 kilometres. The highway also bypassed the

Greco-Roman city of Jerash, avoiding the archaeological sites and residential districts.

According to Dr. Ensour, the 75-kilometre highway has a series of mountains and any part of the range "could crack any time because of the weak clay understructure."

The area around Jerash is the most dangerous, he said.

"There are 15 areas that could cause landslides at any time, including three most dangerous spots, and one of them was the area where the landslide occurred today," he said.

Dr. Ensour stressed that there was no real cause for alarm because landslides are a "known reality" and are expected. Most of the roads are under surveillance at all times by ministry workers, he said.

"This is a reality and we have to deal with it. Hopefully we will be able to control the situation and deal with every abnormal situation that is happening along the road," he said.

"We can predict by detection and special equipments if the mountain will stop but we can't tell when it will stop," the minister added.

The highway shortened the distance from Amman to Irbid by 20 kilometres. The highway also bypassed the

Military security officer shot dead in Algeria

PARIS (Agencies) — Suspected Islamic extremists killed a colonel in Algeria's military security service and two of his bodyguards in an ambush in the capital Algiers, sources close to French intelligence said Tuesday.

Colonel Djilali Meraou, 56, known as Si Salah, died on Sunday when suspected Islamic extremists machine-gunned his car and an escorting vehicle in the Kouba district, a fundamentalist stronghold not far from the city centre.

Two of his bodyguards were also killed and the driver of Meraou's car was badly wounded, the sources said.

Meraou had been charge d'affaires in the press service of the Defence Ministry.

The London-based Al Hayat newspaper said the colonel was an influential figure close to the boss of the military security, Mohammad Mediene, known as Tewfiq.

The government daily Al Moujahid published a death notice saying that Meraou and the two others had died in an "odious terrorist attack."

Last week, bridges and railway lines close to the capital were targeted in bomb attacks and several other bombs were defused. One of them was found in the often crowded Meissonnier market in central Algiers, press reports said.

Security officials in Algiers said Tuesday that eight Islamic extremists had been killed in different parts of the country.

(Continued on page 3)

Yemen opposition leader says Saudi talks a plot

SANA (R) — A Yemeni opposition leader has described talks between Yemen and Saudi Arabia to solve their 60-year-old border dispute as a conspiracy.

Omar Al Gawi, leader of the Yemeni Unionist Party (YUP), told a news conference in Sanaa late Monday night that "what is going on in Saudi Arabia is not negotiations but a conspiracy."

Delegates from both sides have been discussing in the Saudi capital Riyadh for a month how to solve the border problem, with no sign so far of a major breakthrough on a memorandum of understanding.

Mr. Gawi said the Saudis want to divide the question of the demarcation of borders between Saudi Arabia and both former North and South Yemen "and it seems to me

this view has been accepted" by the Yemeni delegation.

The two parts of Yemen merged in 1990, and official sources said Sanaa was insisting in the negotiations that the borders should be treated as one and not two separate issues.

Mr. Gawi said this is a very serious matter" and warned that "the Yemeni people will foil any agreement that affects national sovereignty."

Mr. Gawi's party is one of the main seven opposition groups commanding about 75 seats in the 301-member parliament.

A statement in the name of the seven parties read during the conference also warned "the people will foil any agreement molesting their sovereignty, soil and national wealth."

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That part of the mission

Beirut seeks to end clashes in south

BEIRUT (Agencies) — Lebanese Foreign Minister Faris Bouez said on Tuesday he had started contacts with a number of countries to prevent worsening of the latest round of violence in South Lebanon.

But addressing parliament's external affairs committee on the third day of clashes between guerrillas and Israeli forces, Mr. Bouez dampened the hopes of some members of parliament (MPs) that Lebanon would make a complaint against Israel to the U.N. Security Council.

"I am afraid that if we submit a complaint to the Security Council, the vote may not be in our favour," Mr. Bouez said.

Later, he told Reuters: "I am holding contacts with some countries over the situation in the south."

Mr. Bouez said he suggested to the cabinet the formation of a ministerial emergency committee to follow up flare-ups in South Lebanon.

"It was customary that we ask for American intervention whenever there is an (Israeli) aggression, but now we have to depend on ourselves because I fear that the American side may not interfere," Mr. Bouez said.

Guerrillas attacked three posts of the Israeli-hacked South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia on Tuesday, wounding one militiaman, pro-Israeli militia sources said.

Violence escalating since Sunday has threatened to further slow down the U.S.-sponsored Middle East peace process.

Security sources said Israeli gunners simultaneously pounded guerrilla-held areas round the zone but no one was hurt.

Israeli planes and artillery have blasted guerrilla-held areas in South Lebanon in the past two days, killing two civilians and a guerrilla on Sunday after pro-Iranian Hezbollah (Party of God) fighters killed an SLA militiaman.

One SLA militiaman was wounded when guerrillas opened up with mortars and rocket-propelled grenades on the outposts of Arama and Toumat Nihal in mountains on the northeastern edge of the Israeli-occupied border enclave, sources said.

Shortly after the 10 a.m. (0800 GMT) attack, Israeli gunners blasted suspected guerrilla targets near the villages of Maidoun and Ain Al Tineh in the lowland southeast of Toumat Nihal, the sources said. They requested anonymity.

"Ain Al Tineh is on the southern edge of the Bekaa Valley and close to where Israeli warplanes staged two air raids on Monday.

There was no word on casualties in Tuesday's howitzer barrage, which reached a climax of 15 shells in 30 minutes.

Violence escalating since Sunday has threatened to further slow down the U.S.-sponsored Middle East peace process.

(Continued on page 3)

COLUMN

U.K. policeman acquitted of raping colleague.

LONDON (AFP) — A 25-year-old police constable was acquitted of raping a colleague following a New Year's Eve party after he told an eight-man, four-woman jury, "I know that when a woman says no she means no."

Michael Searc had been accused by a policewoman of lunging her back to his room in the Surrey Police Headquarters bachelors' dormitory on the pretence of being too drunk to walk by himself after the party Jan. 1 last year. The woman, also 25, whose identity as an alleged rape victim is protected by law, said that once they were in his room he locked the door and raped her. Mr. Searc, testifying during his six-day trial, termed the charge "sheer fabrication," saying the two engaged only in consensual, non-coital intimacies, as they had on previous nights, stopping when she said "no". He said the woman had been romantically involved at the time with a friend of his, another policeman living in the same dormitory.

Unknown jumping dinosaur discovered

PARIS (AFP) — The remains of a previously unknown species of two-legged dinosaur which probably jumped a great deal has been unearthed in southeast France, archaeological officials said Monday. The pelvis and back leg of the 100 million year old creature, which was probably about 1.5 metres (about six feet) tall, have been discovered near the town of Sisteron, half way between Grenoble and the south coast. The National Museum of Natural History, which has christened the animal "Genosaurus sisteronensis," said it belongs to a species which had been thought to have died out before the Jurassic era, 40 million years earlier. The museum's Professor Philippe Taquet said the creature had strong legs and was probably a good jumper. "It's very prominent knees would have allowed it to make very big leaps, or at least given it very supple legs," he said.

In Germany, the Frankfurter Allgemeine newspaper said negotiations had been going on for years and had now "entered the decisive stage."

Iran had provided Israel with a videotape showing Arad was alive and a letter from him, the daily said, quoting Bonn security officials.

Mr. Rabin's spokesman for Chancellor Helmut Kohl, said he "won't deny there have been such contacts (with Iran). But I don't know of any details. The job of secret services is to be secret."

Zeev Schiff, military analyst for the Haaretz daily, said he was certain the Germans are holding talks with the Iranians and that "in these talks they bring up the issue of Ron Arad."

Mr. Schiff said the Germans apparently leaked the Arad talks to deflect U.S. criticism over their deepening economic ties with Iran through Germany have taken place.

(Continued on page 3)

Sweden mourns as baby rhino Nelson dies

STOCKHOLM (AFP) — His plight had touched a nation but no amount of kindness could save Nelson the sick rhino, who died Monday after suffering from a brain disease since birth. Sweden was in mourning as the director of Kolmarns Zoo, southwest of Stockholm, announced the death only hours after vets said the baby rhinoceros would have to be put down Tuesday because they could not treat a herpes-like virus affecting his brain.

The nation's media had published regular bulletins on his health since he was born prematurely on Feb. 11 and children pleaded for vets to save him. But Bengt Roeken, the vet treating Nelson — named after South African President Nelson Mandela — at the University Hospital in Uppsala, north of Stockholm, said earlier Monday: "You can't keep a two-tonne animal alive when it can't stand up straight."

Italian marines due to help cover the withdrawal of U.N. troops are confident of securing the port and airport, their commander said.

Admiral Elio Bolongaro, second-in-command of the U.S.-led operation, refused to specify when the 500 Italian and 2,600 U.S. marines will hit the beaches from landing craft saying that was "a military secret."

The same response was given by a U.S. lieutenant-colonel who is spokesman for the 18-ship armada.